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A Reunion Across the Pond

President Davis joins students and alumni to celebrate study away in London **BY WILLARD PATE**

At approximately 8 a.m. on Sunday, Sept. 7, 1969, an Air India plane carrying 28 Furman students touched down at London's Heathrow Airport. These students were pioneers who blazed the trail not only for Furman's first fall term program in the British Isles, but for Furman's first credit-bearing program in what is now a long list of study away destinations.

The program in the British Isles was the brainchild of former Vice President and Dean Francis Bonner, whose visionary leadership laid the foundation for Furman's now global presence. Dean Bonner, Phil Elliott of the English department and Ed Jones of the history department wrote the letters, visited the sites and did the footwork in the planning stages. So when the students, accompanied by Jones, left Heathrow that September morning to begin their travels, things went smoothly.

The group started in Canterbury and went counter-clockwise through Thomas Hardy country, the Lake District, and back down the east coast before reaching London. During their eight-week stay in London, they lived at the Kenilworth Hotel in Bloomsbury and walked to their classes at Birkbeck College. In November, John Crabtree, then dean of students and professor of English, accompanied them to Stratford-upon-Avon, where they studied at the

Shakespeare Institute for four weeks before returning home on Dec. 10.

Forty-eight years later, about 1,500 students and more than 30 members of the faculty have made this journey. Over the years much has changed, yet much remains the same. The groups still tour and then settle into the Bloomsbury district in London for lodging and classes at Birkbeck College. In Stratford, classes are now held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, but the



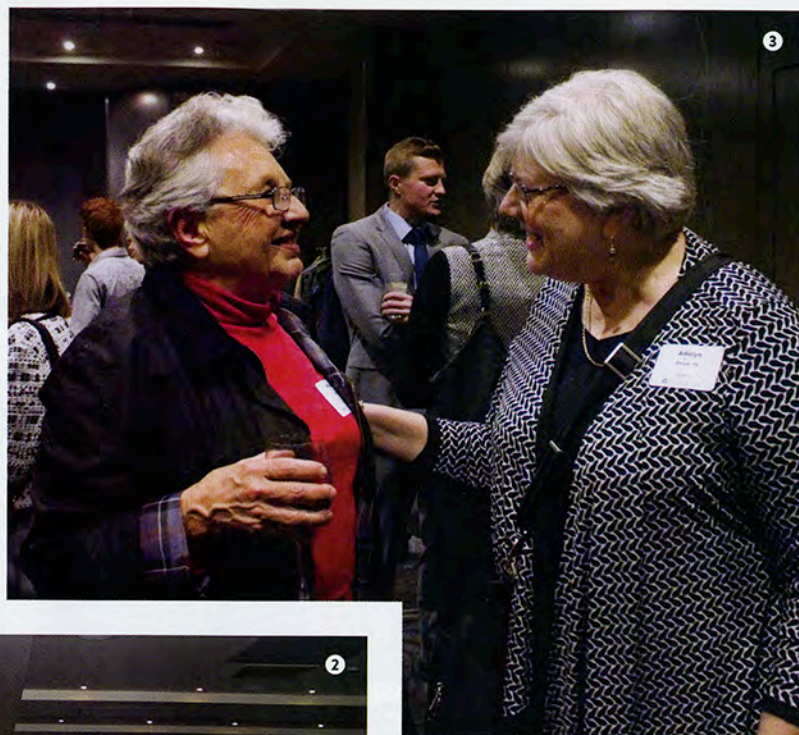
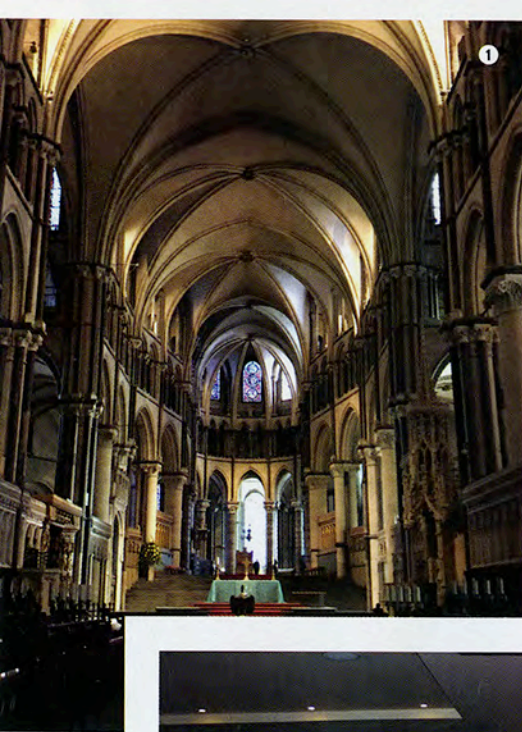


Sophie Harris '19 and **Campbell Sullivan '19** pose at Stonehenge during a group tour from Bath to London in September.

program format is the same – lectures from renowned Shakespearean scholars like Sir Stanley Wells and Robert Smallwood, visits to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, and chats with actors both in the more formal classroom setting and in the Dirty Duck pub. Perhaps the biggest change came when Furman adopted the semester system and thus made offering a fourth course imperative. Beginning in 1970, the tour usually started with five to seven days in Ireland, so a logical

choice most years has been to extend the stay on the Emerald Isle.

Whether it's the theater, museums, glorious landscapes or something unique to the culture, the British Isles have always drawn fall term participants back across the Atlantic. Some enroll in graduate programs (The London School of Economics, Cambridge, Oxford, The Shakespeare Institute), or find internships, like **Maddie DePree '20**, who landed an opportunity at the



Shakespeare Centre in Stratford. Many, however, get the travel bug and return just for the pleasure of going to the theater or walking the streets of London and Stratford once again.

This past autumn, several projects came into alignment and allowed Furman to sponsor a return trip. **Mike Harley '82**, an alum of the trip, suggested that all alums from 1969–2016 be invited to a reunion in London. Second was President Elizabeth Davis's enthusiasm for sampling some of our many study away programs that can be counted among the rich offerings of The Furman Advantage. In May, she and her husband, Charles, had joined the slow-food Italy group in Rome for a few days; now she would visit a semester-long program for a week. Third was the Office of Alumni and Parent Engagement's desire to begin sponsoring travel programs. Because the first two projects were already underway, London was selected as the first destination. In late June, **Leo Fackler '03**, associate director of Alumni and Parent

Engagement, sent out an invitation to alumni and parents to join the Davises and the students participating in the 2017 program for their own travel experience and a London reception on Oct. 27.

By the evening of that reception the Davises had spent five days with the students, attending three plays (including the Tony award-winning "Oslo"), taking a coach trip to Canterbury, where Chaucer had his pilgrims "from every shires ende/of Englund . . . wende [their way]/ The holy blissful Martir for to seke . . .," taking in the Harry Potter and Magic exhibit at the British Library, and touring backstage at the National Theatre.

Approximately 60 people gathered to greet the Davises and to swap stories. Alumni ranged from 1950s graduates to **Kaitlin Parham '13**. Other attendees were Furman alumni who are now living in London or the surrounding area. **Beth Brougner '86** fit both categories. Falling in love with the British Isles while a student on the trip in '84, she took up residence



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- 1 The Quire at Canterbury Cathedral is the first Gothic building in England.
- 2 Furman alumni, students and faculty gathered for the alumni reception.
- 3 Furman Professor of English Willard Pate (left) and **Adelyn Elliott '78**.
- 4 The Thames.
- 5 President Elizabeth Davis, **Emily Matthews '19** and Charles Davis at dinner before the group saw "Oslo," a National Theatre play at the Harold Pinter Theatre.
- 6 **Robin Reid Tidwell '91** made the British Isles trip with her son **Reid Tidwell '19**.
- 7 President Davis at the alumni reception.
- 8 Professor of Politics and International Affairs Don Aiesi (right) speaks to an alumnus who attended the London Reception, Oct. 27.

abroad almost immediately after graduation. She lives just outside of London, but maintains a flat in Covent Garden, where she stays when she pops into the city to attend theatrical productions.

Robin Reid Tidwell '91, who participated in the program in 1989, has a full schedule as an attorney, but when Fackler's message about an alumni trip to the British Isles came, she knew she had to find time to participate. She could not pass up the opportunity to share the experience with her son **Reid '19**, who would be there as a student. In the four days Robin was in London, she and Reid visited sites such as the British Museum. Then on her final day, Robin joined the student group for a trip to Cambridge to visit the beautiful King's College Chapel she had seen 28 years earlier.

Catherine Day '84, **Elizabeth Partridge '84** and **Julie Bledsoe Thomas '85**, friends on the trip in 1983, had stayed in touch since graduation and jumped at the chance to have a mini-reunion. Their excitement was

palpable as they talked about retracing old steps and exploring new venues: visits to the theater, a day trip to Stratford-upon-Avon to pose in front of the guest house where they had stayed 34 years ago, indulging in a "sinful" tea at Harrods, and riding the Tube to the Sunday morning Columbia Road Flower Market, where Catherine, now a master gardener, thought she was in heaven.

As the British Isles program and study away at Furman approach a 50th anniversary, participants will come home with their own memories. And with the alumni office sponsoring more trips, Furman alums will be able to reconnect with those memories as **Kaitlin Parham '13** did. "Revisiting one of my favorite cities with fellow Furman alumni made for a trip of a lifetime. It almost felt like I was studying abroad again!"

Associate Professor of History Jason Hansen led an alumni and parent trip to Vietnam in March, and more Furman faculty-led travel experiences will be offered in 2019. ●